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Firearms in Canada and Eight Other Western Countries: Selected Findings of the 1996 International Crime (Victim) Survey

Richard Block

January, 1998


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Canadian Firearms Centre/
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
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January, 1998

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*The present study was funded by the Canadian Firearms Centre,
Department of Justice Canada. The views expressed herein are
solely those of the author and do not necessarily
represent the views of the Department of Justice Canada.*

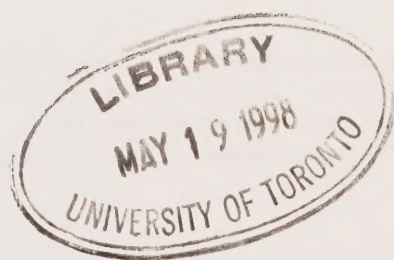


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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author wishes to acknowledge the extensive contributions of Ms. Melissa O’Leary to the final text and appreciates her work to ensure the report is relevant to Canadians.

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Erratum

Page 7, Paragraph 2, Sentence 3 should read:

In Quebec and Ontario, approximately 1.5% of the households owned at least one handgun; the Atlantic provinces and British Columbia were slightly higher at around 3%, while the Prairies were highest at 4.11% (Figure Four).

Also, Page 7, Paragraph 3 refers to Figure Five.

Erratum

La troisième phrase du deuxième paragraphe de la page 7 devrait se lire comme suit :

Au Québec et en Ontario, près de 1,5 % des ménages possédaient au moins une arme de poing. Le pourcentage était légèrement supérieur dans les provinces atlantiques et en Colombie-britannique, où environ 3 % des ménages en possédaient une. Enfin, le pourcentage le plus élevé a été enregistré dans les Prairies (4,11 %) (figure quatre).

Le troisième paragraphe de la page 7 se rapporte à la figure cinq.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FIREARMS IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

This paper comparatively summarizes the Canadian experience with regards to firearms ownership and victimisation in relation to eight other Western industrialized societies, as measured in the International Crime (Victim) Survey 1996 (IC(V)S). The countries included in this comparison are: England and Wales, Scotland, The Netherlands, Switzerland, France, Sweden, Austria, and the United States. In particular, the comparison focuses on a new set of questions within the survey which relate to firearms. The IC(V)S queries a random population sample regarding whether or not they have been victimized, the nature of their victimization, attitudes toward crime and the criminal justice system, and household possession of a firearm. Questions and methodology are uniform across countries, and are therefore not based upon police statistics.

The survey indicated:

- Canada was in the mid-range of firearms ownership. Nearly 22% of Canadian households possessed at least one firearm. Possession was highest in the United States (48.6%) and lowest in England and Wales, Scotland, and the Netherlands.
- Among the regions of Canada, firearms ownership varied from 14% owning at least one gun in Ontario to 36% owning at least one gun in the Atlantic provinces. In four regions, gun owners predominately owned rifles (the Atlantic Provinces, British Columbia, Ontario and the Prairie Provinces). In Quebec, gun owners mostly owned shotguns (76.9%). The percentage of gun owners who owned a handgun varied from 6.0% in Quebec to 16.1% in British Columbia.
- Almost all Canadian households with a firearm possessed a long gun (95.1%). These households represented 19.2% of all Canadian households. In contrast, 12% of Canadian gun owning households possessed a handgun and this represented 2.3% of all Canadian households. Only about 2.2% of Canadian households owned both a handgun and a long gun.
- In eight countries, hunting or sports were the most common reasons for possession of a gun, with Switzerland's requirement for military possession being the only exception. Canadian respondents were most likely to report that the gun was owned for hunting (72.7%); this trend is consistent across the country's five regions.
- Canada was in a group of five countries in which 3% to 4% of respondents reported being robbed at least once in the last five years. One percent of Canadians reported they were victims of armed robbery and 0.42% reported specifically that they were victims of a firearm-related attack. These percentages were similar to the rates of all other countries, with the

exception of the United States. Respondents from the United States were more likely to be victims of an armed attack and much more likely to be a victim of a firearm-related attack.

- Respondents in all countries who were the victim of a violent offence were more likely to be assaulted or threatened than robbed in the last five years; Canadian respondents were in the middle range of likelihood (12.7%). Assaults and threats with firearms were most common in the United States where over 2% of respondents were assaulted or threatened with a gun in the last five years.
- In all countries, gun ownership was related to size of place of residence. Residents of the smallest communities were most likely to own a firearm and residents of the largest communities were least likely to own a firearm. This trend was particularly evident in Canada with respect to long gun ownership. Among Canadian respondents from small towns, 33.6% owned a long gun, in contrast to 1.2% owning a long gun in the largest cities. The relationship was not as clear for mid-range cities in the 10,000 - 1,000,000 population range.

1.0 INTRODUCTION: THE INTERNATIONAL CRIME (VICTIM) SURVEY

The International Crime (Victim) Survey (IC(V)S) presents a unique opportunity for Canadians to compare their patterns of firearms ownership, crime patterns and resident attitudes and fears about crime to those of residents in other countries. This survey, which has now been administered in 58 countries, asks identical questions of a random sample of residents. The survey, which was sponsored by The United Nations International Crime Research Institute (UNICRI) and the Ministry of Justice of the Netherlands, has now completed its third sweep since 1989. Canada has participated in all three rounds of the questionnaire administration.¹ The most recent sweep of the IC(V)S included new questions about firearms ownership, the purpose of gun ownership, firearms victimization and other crime concerns. The present report will draw from these new questions, which have never before been collected in this manner.

From 1995-1997, 44 countries participated in the third sweep of the IC(V)S.² These countries included industrialized, developing, and countries in transition; although, in most less developed countries, only a single city was surveyed. For the purpose of this report, Canada will be compared to the eight other Western industrialized societies in which a nation-wide survey was completed. These countries include: England and Wales, Scotland, The Netherlands, Switzerland, France, Sweden, Austria, and the United States.³

The IC(V)S is not based upon official statistics. In each country, a random sample of 1000 to 2000 residents (aged 16 or over) were asked about fear of crime, attitudes toward the criminal justice system, firearms ownership⁴, and whether or not they were a victim of specific crimes in the last year and/or the previous five years. In industrialized countries a national random sample of telephone interviews was conducted.⁵ Respondents who were victimized were

¹ The survey is available from the Law School of the University of Leyden (van Kesteren, 1997). Without van Kesteren's diligence, analysis of the survey would have been impossible.

² Countries with national surveys include: England & Wales; Scotland; Northern Ireland; The Netherlands; Switzerland; France; Finland; Sweden; Austria; USA; Canada; Malta; Czech Republic; Georgia; Poland; and, Slovenia. Countries with city surveys include: Argentina (Buenos Aires); Bolivia (La Paz); Brazil (Rio de Janeiro); Costa Rica; India (Bombay); Indonesia (Jakarta, Surabaya); South Africa (Johannesburg); The Philippines (Manila); Uganda (Kampala); Zimbabwe (Harare); Paraguay (Asunción); Colombia (Bogota); Albania (Tirana); Estonia; Hungary (Budapest); Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek and Osh); Latvia; Mongolia (Ulan Baatar); Romania (Bucharest); Russia (Moscow); Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Belgrade); Belarus (Minsk); Bulgaria (Sofia); Croatia (Zagreb); Lithuania (Vilnius, Klaipeda, Kaunas); Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (Skopje); Slovakia (Bratislava); and, Ukraine (Kiev).

³ Finland is excluded from the analysis because data were not available at the time of this study.

⁴ Air guns are not included in this analysis.

⁵ This method is referred to as CATI - computer assisted telephone interviewing. Interviewers are prompted by a computer, through which questions are read and recorded; this permits rigorous standardisation of questionnaire

asked details regarding the last incident of each crime type. Since the survey is not bound by differences in legal definitions, reporting rates or recording practices, and uses similar methodologies in each industrialized country, it permits for direct comparisons that are not possible with other crime statistics.

Specifically, the present report will examine the IC(V)S in terms of: firearms ownership and reasons for firearms ownership⁶, both within a comparative context and within Canadian regions; armed confrontations and the prevalence of victimization, as indicated by reported victimization involving robbery, assault and threats; and finally, a comparison of firearms ownership by size of place of residence.

computer, through which questions are read and recorded; this permits rigorous standardisation of questionnaire application, as well as improved sampling techniques. It is a well accepted method of conducting victimization studies in areas with high rates of household telephone ownership.

⁶ Given resource and methodological limitations, it is not possible to ascertain the specific number of firearms owned within any one household, nor to extrapolate the number of firearms in civilian ownership. Therefore, while the survey can offer an estimate of the number of gun-owning households, the survey cannot by itself distinguish the number of firearms.

2.0 FIREARMS OWNERSHIP

In all nine surveys, respondents were asked if any resident of the home owned a firearm (see Appendix A for specific questions on firearms).⁷ Of the nine countries surveyed, Canada was in the middle range of gun ownership (Figure One). In Canada, 21.9% of households possessed at least one gun, which is a rate comparable to France, Sweden, and Austria.⁸ At the lower end of the scale, less than 5% of households possessed at least one gun in England and Wales, Scotland, and the Netherlands. In contrast, 36.4% of households in Switzerland and 48.5% of households in the United States possessed at least one gun, representing the higher range of ownership.

While the survey did not ask how many firearms were owned, it did ask what types of firearms were owned. From a policy perspective, gun ownership can be looked at in two ways: what percentage of *all households* own a particular type of firearm, and of the *gun owning households*, what percentage own a particular type of firearm.⁹ Although the percentage of households owning at least one long gun varied greatly from country to country, regardless of region, most households that possessed a firearm possessed at least one long gun (Figure Two).¹⁰

In Canada, 19.1% of all households owned a long gun, but 95% of gun owning households possessed a long gun. Similarly, while fewer households possessed a long gun in England and Wales (3.4% of all households), of gun owning households, 93.6% owned a long gun. In contrast, in Switzerland, while the percentage of long gun owning households (22.7%) was similar to Canada, these represented a smaller percentage of all gun owning households (72.8%). In the United States, 35.4% of all households possessed at least one long gun, but this represented 81.1% of all gun owning households.

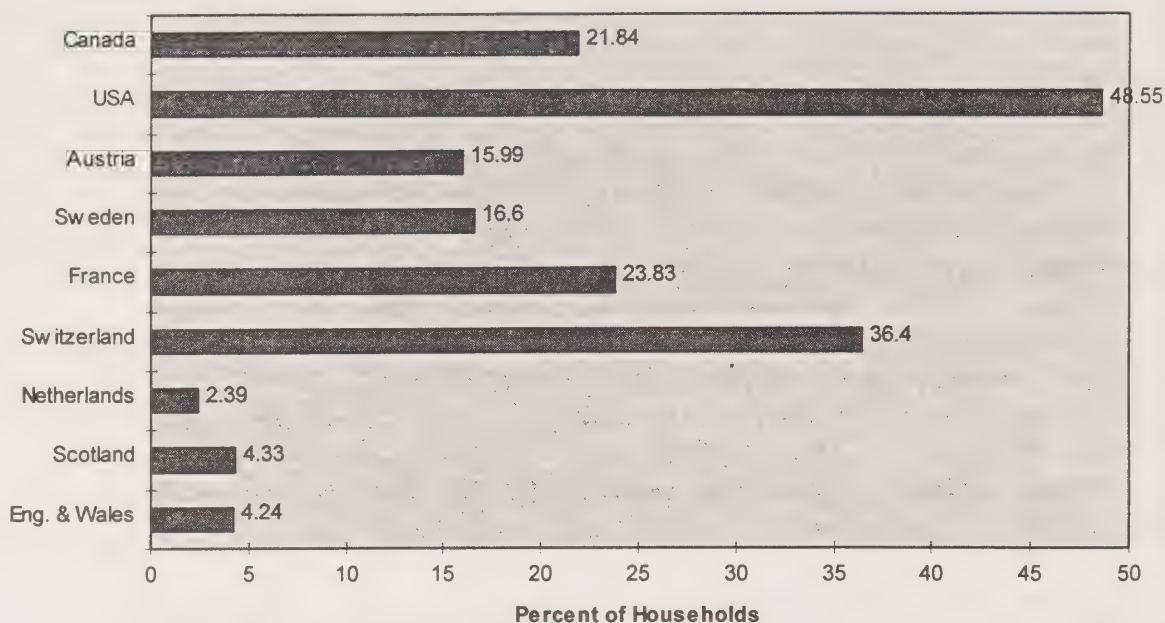
⁷ While the survey has much information about its respondents, it does not ask if the respondent is the owner of the household firearm(s); thus, any personal characteristic of the respondent may not apply to gun owners. The respondent is asked only limited questions about the family. They are asked to identify the family's social class by percentile, but many respondents had difficulty with this question. Therefore, we know little from this survey about the individual or family demography of gun owners.

⁸ Due to statistical margins of error, this number may under-estimate the true rate of household firearm ownership in Canada. Statistical analyses have suggested that 26% may be the most reliable figure, based upon the combined findings of several studies. These surveys include: International Crime (Victim) Survey (1989); ICCS Study (G.A. Mauser & M. Margolis, 1990); Angus Reid (1991); International Crime (Victim) Study (1992); Insight I (1992); Insight II (1993); Insight III (1994); Angus Reid (1994); and, International Crime (Victim) Survey (1996).

⁹ Since many households, especially in the United States, own more than one type of firearm (Cook & Ludwig, 1996), it is inappropriate to add percentages across Figures Two and Three.

¹⁰ In a few households possessing a firearm, the respondent did not know or refused to identify the type of weapon. One percent of Canadian respondents refused to answer the question on ownership.

Figure One: Percentage of Households with One or More Guns



All nine countries displayed a partiality towards long gun ownership; in all instances, the rate of household long gun ownership exceeded that of handgun ownership. Canada was among five countries in which fewer than 5% of households owned a handgun and these represented less than 15% of all gun owning households (Figure Three). Specifically, in Canada, 2.3% of all households owned a handgun and this represented 11.7% of all gun owning households.

In the remaining four countries, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, and the United States, more than 40% of gun owning households owned at least one handgun. While this was a very small percentage of all households in the Netherlands, it was a relatively large percentage in the other three countries. In the United States, 25.1% of all households and 57.8% of all gun owning households owned a handgun.

Conversely, handgun owners in several countries were also likely to own a long gun. In Switzerland 38.4% of handgun owners also owned a long gun, in contrast to 23.3% of long gun owners who owned a handgun. In the United States, 47.6% of long gun owners also owned a handgun, while 67.1% of handgun owners also owned a long gun. In Canada handgun ownership was rare, and only 6.8% of long gun owners also owned a handgun; however, the majority of handgun owners also owned a long gun (56.0%).

Figure Two: Percentage of Households Owning One or More Long Guns

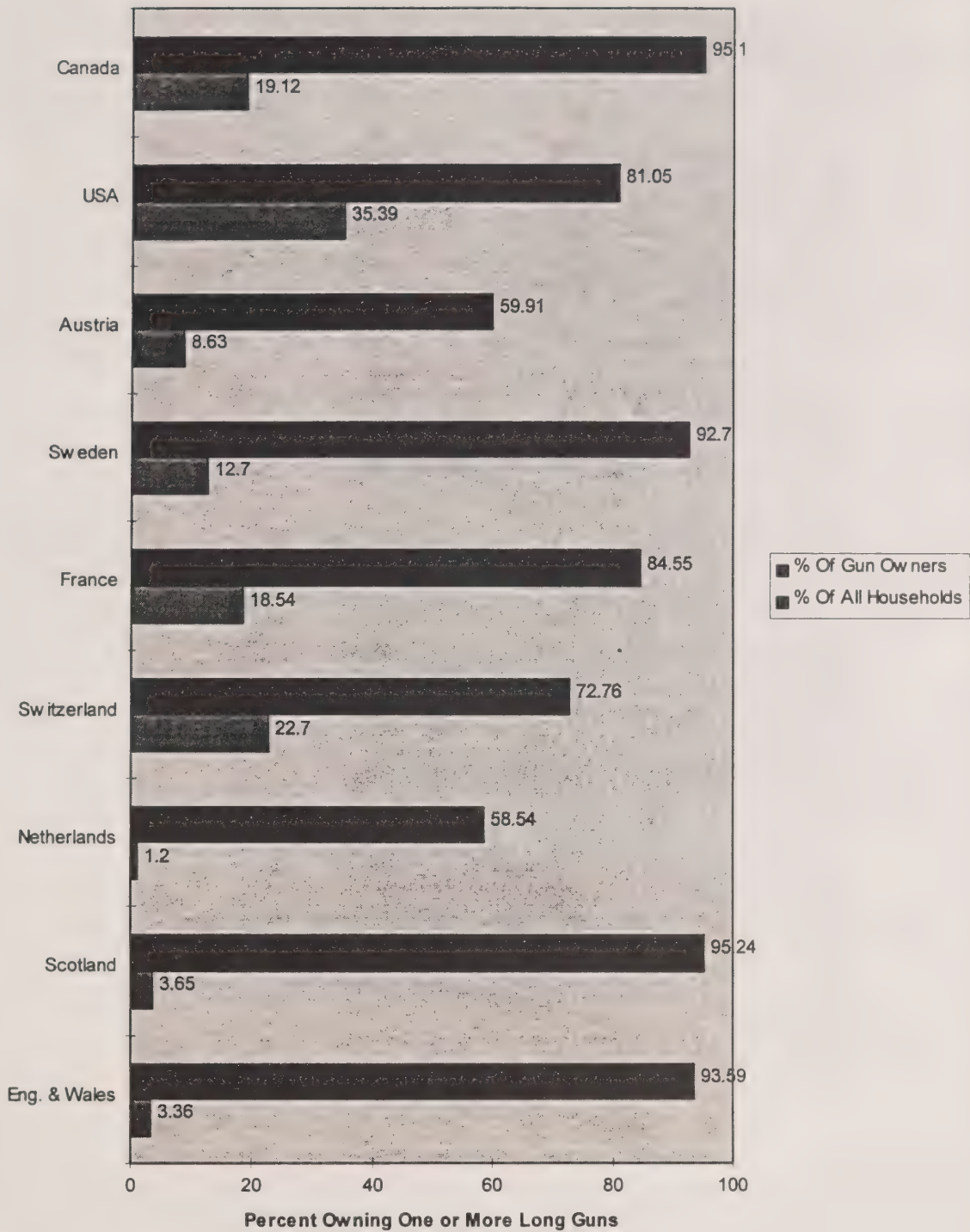
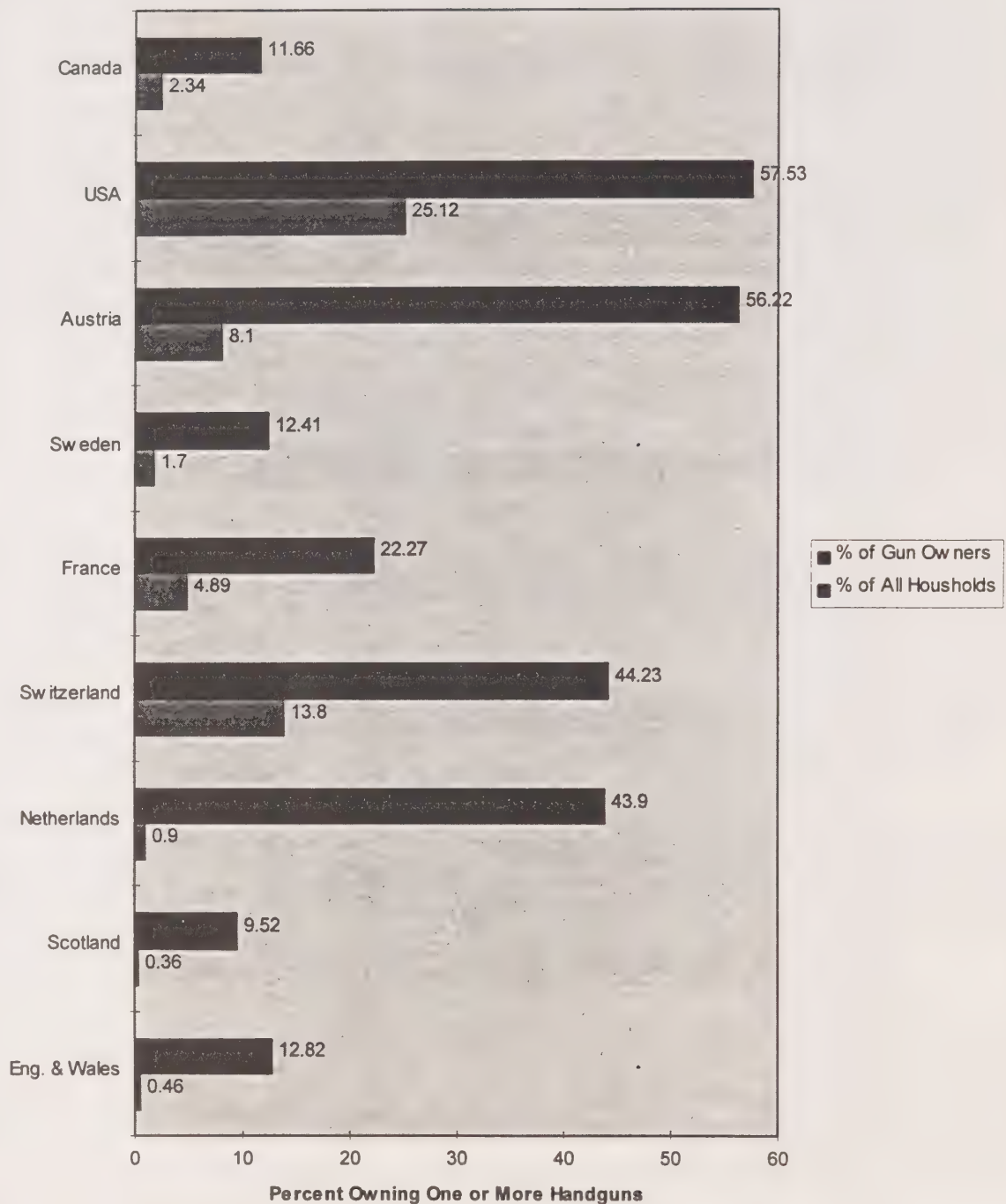


Figure Three: Percentage of Households Owning One or More Handguns



3.0 FIREARM OWNERSHIP IN CANADA

The percentage of households owning at least one firearm varied considerably across Canada (Figure Four). The Atlantic provinces had the highest percentage of gun owning households (35.8%) and Ontario had the lowest percentage (14.2%). Since almost all gun owning households had at least one long gun and very few had a handgun, the percentage of households owning a long gun in each region was only slightly smaller than the percentage owning any firearm.¹¹

Although the survey does not ask how many guns are owned, overall only about 2% of Canadian households owned both a handgun and a long gun. However, the proportion of handgun owning households, while small, varied across the regions. In Quebec and Ontario fewer than 1.5% of the households owned at least one handgun; the Atlantic Provinces were slightly higher at around 3%, while Quebec was at 6%, and British Columbia was highest at 16.1% (Figure Five).

In four of the regions, gun owning households were most likely to possess a rifle; the exception being Quebec, where far more households owned a shotgun (76.7%) than owned a rifle (30.1%). Rifles were most common in the Prairie provinces, with 82.9% of gun owning households owning a rifle and 45.7% owning a shotgun. In Ontario, 59.3% of gun owning households possessed a rifle and 55.6% possessed a shotgun. In all five regions, many households in possession of a rifle also possessed a shotgun. Thus, overall levels of gun ownership varied among the regions of Canada, as did the type of firearm owned. While possession of a handgun was rare everywhere, possession of a shotgun or rifle was more common, but varied across the regions.

¹¹ Regional break-down includes the following: Atlantic Provinces (Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island), Quebec, Ontario, the Prairie Provinces (Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan), and British Columbia. Given that over-sampling would have been required, the territories were not included. More specific regional information on firearm ownership in Canada can be obtained through the Department of Justice Canada report *Firearm Ownership in Canada* (Angus Reid, 1991).

Figure Four: Households Owning at Least One Firearm in Canada

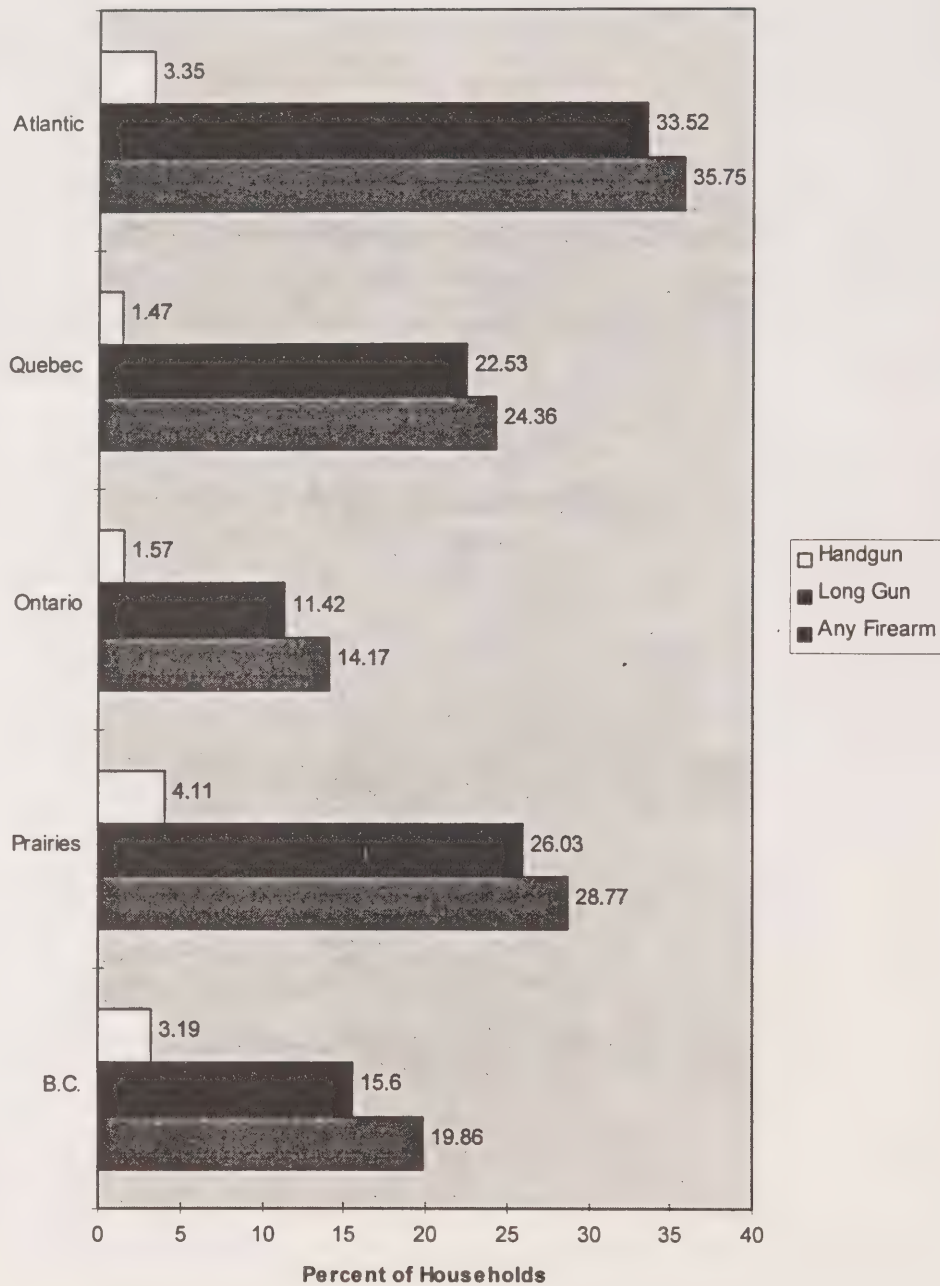
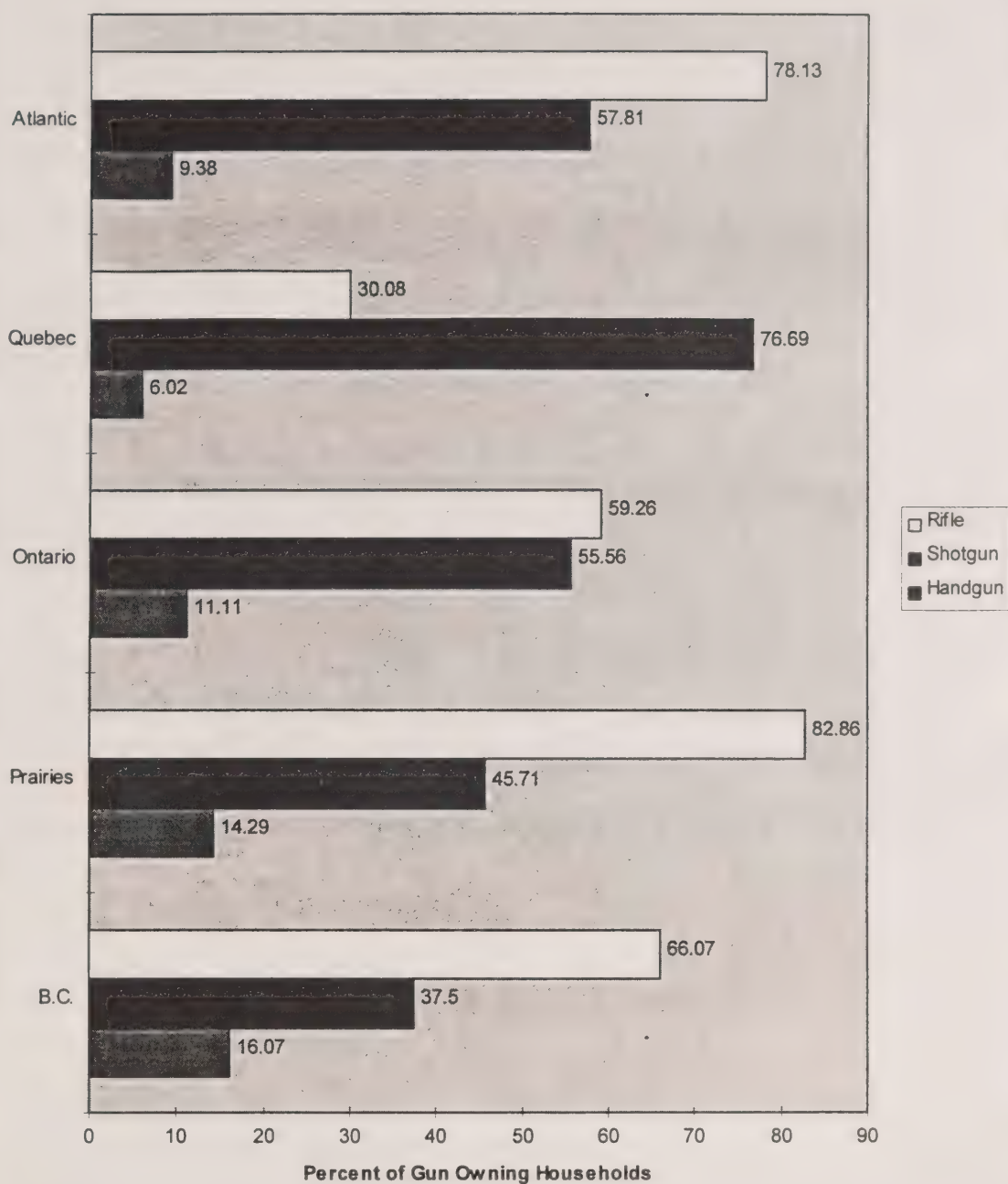


Figure Five: Types of Guns Owned in Canada



4.0 REASONS FOR FIREARMS OWNERSHIP

Every respondent whose household possessed at least one gun was asked the purpose of ownership.¹² In eight of nine countries (excepting Switzerland), the most frequent reasons for ownership were hunting or target shooting (Figure Six).¹³ In France, Sweden, Austria, the United States, and Canada, hunting was the most frequent reason given for gun ownership. In the three low gun ownership countries, England and Wales, Scotland, and the Netherlands, guns were owned predominantly for target shooting rather than hunting.

Canadian respondents were considerably more likely to own their firearm for the purpose of hunting (72.7%) than those of any country, while target shooting was the second most common response (18.4%). In addition, 10% of respondents stated that they owned a firearm because there had always been one in the home, and few listed protection as a reason for ownership (4.6%).

In contrast to the other eight countries, in Switzerland the requirement that male citizens keep a gun ready for defense of their country resulted in 64.3% of respondents in gun owning households listing army/police requirements as a reason for owning a gun. In addition, 19% of gun owning households owned the weapon for target shooting; other reasons accounted for less than 10% of respondents.

In three countries, France, Austria, and the United States, protection was a common reason for gun ownership.¹⁴ The United States and Austria had proportionately more handgun owners than the other seven countries. Perhaps reflecting a predominance of multiple gun ownership or a greater tradition of widespread gun ownership, United States respondents listed a wider range of reasons for gun ownership. While hunting (57.7%) was mentioned by a majority of respondents, 38.9% of respondents also had a gun for protection, and 12.9% were collectors of guns. Many respondents simply stated that there had always been a gun in the household (20.4%).

¹² The survey did not distinguish reasons for ownership based on firearms types. This is especially important for handgun owners because in several countries, including Canada, handgun owning households were also likely to own a long gun and consequently, reasons for owning a handgun cannot be separated from those for owning a long gun. It might be recommended that future sweeps of the IC(V)S examine reasons for ownership based on firearm type.

¹³ This is a multiple response question. Percentages can add to more than 100.

¹⁴ The response does not differentiate between protection from animals and protection from humans.

Figure Six A: Reasons for Gun Possession

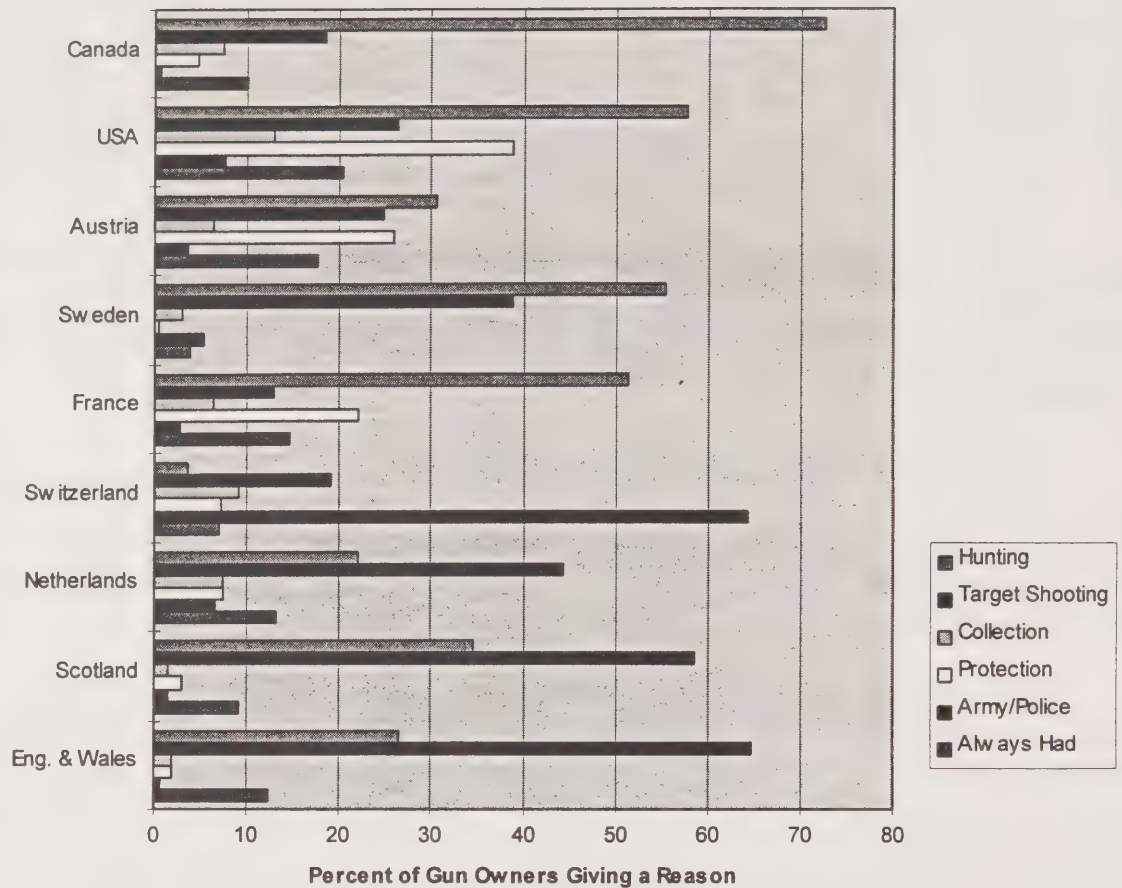


Figure Six B: Reasons for Firearms Ownership (Data)

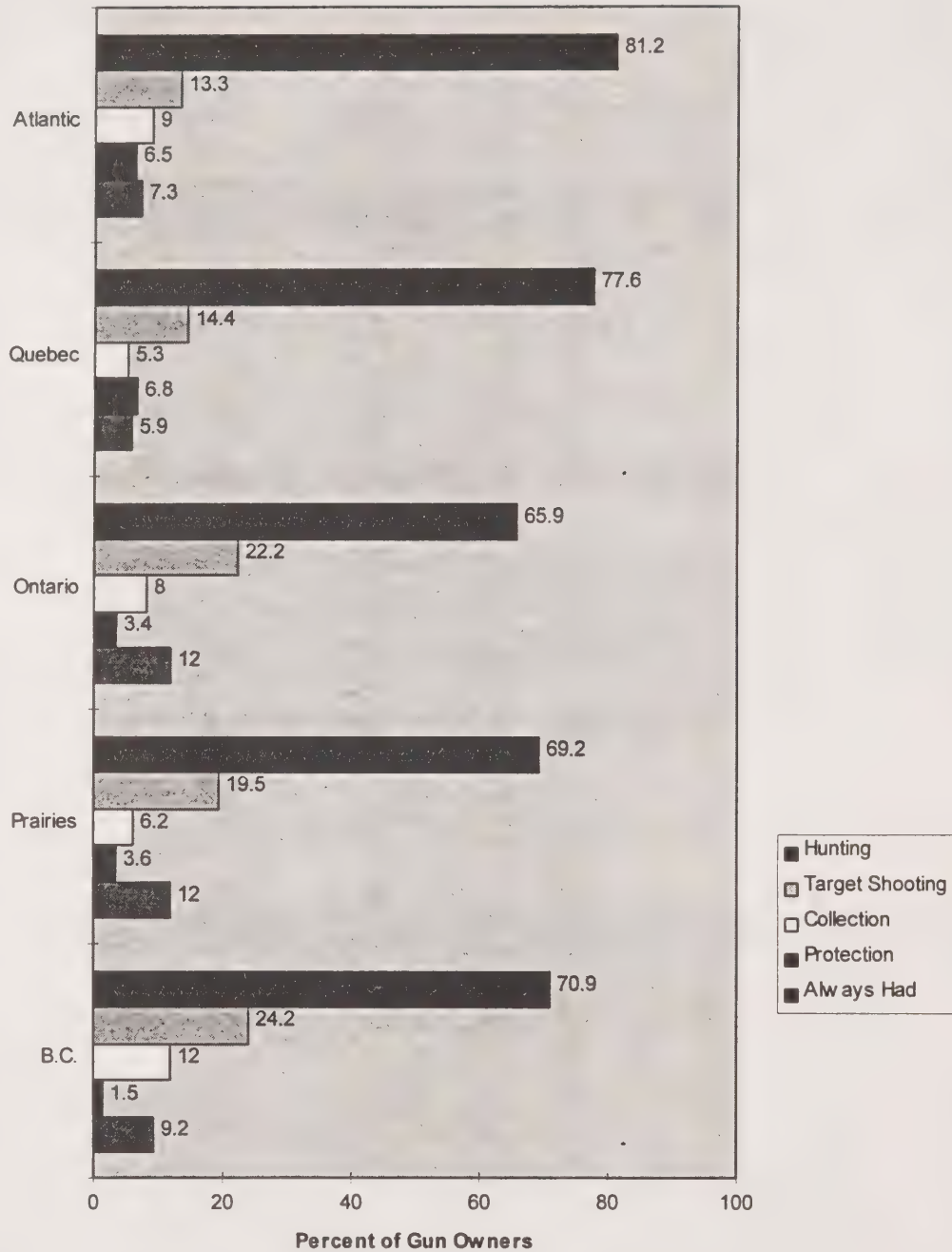
	Always Had	Army/Police	Protection	Collection	Target Shooting	Hunting
Eng. & Wales	12.35	0.62	1.85	1.85	64.81	26.54
Scotland	9.02	1.5	3.01	1.5	58.65	34.59
Netherlands	13.11	6.56	7.38	7.38	44.26	22.13
Switzerland	6.98	64.34	7.24	9.04	19.12	3.62
France	14.62	2.77	22.13	6.32	13.04	51.38
Sweden	3.92	5.39	0.49	2.94	38.73	55.39
Austria	17.63	3.6	25.9	6.47	24.82	30.58
USA	20.36	7.66	38.91	12.9	26.41	57.66
Canada	9.98	0.6	4.59	7.39	18.36	72.65

5.0 REASONS FOR FIREARMS OWNERSHIP ACROSS CANADA

Across Canada's five regions, hunting was found to be the predominant reason for gun ownership (Figure Seven). The rates of ownership for the purpose of hunting were highest in the Atlantic provinces (81.2%) and in Quebec (77.6%). In every region, target shooting was the second most common response and was especially popular in British Columbia (24.2%) and Ontario (22.2%). While protection was not a common reason given for gun ownership in any region, the proportion of respondents who stated that their household owned a gun for protection varied from 1.5% in British Columbia to 6.8% in Quebec.¹⁵ In the Western provinces and in Ontario, a substantial percentage of respondents stated that they had a gun in the household because there had always been one present.

¹⁵Given the small number of gun owning respondents from each region and the small percentage of these that give protection as a reason for ownership, comparisons across regions must be made very cautiously.

Figure Seven: Reasons for Firearms Ownership in the Five Canadian Regions



6.0 ARMED CONFRONTATIONS: PREVALENCE OF VICTIMIZATION

Each respondent in the survey was asked whether or not they had been a victim of robbery, an assault or a threat in the past five years and/or past year. Women were asked whether or not they had been a victim of a sexual offense involving a firearm.¹⁶ In this section, the rates of victimization in the nine countries with regards to robbery, assaults or threats, the presence of a weapon during the incident, and, finally, the involvement of a firearm will be compared.¹⁷

It must be noted that only certain indices of firearm misuse are within the realm of this report, since victimization surveys are limited to purposive acts inflicted by another person, where the victim is able to report such an occurrence. Therefore, some of the most serious indicators of firearm harm are beyond this scope; for example, homicide cannot be reported through a victimization survey, for obvious reasons. In addition, other harms associated with firearms are not within the scope of this survey, such as suicide, suicide attempts and firearm-related accidents.

6.1 Robbery

The percentage of respondents who were a victim of robbery at least once in the past five years varied from 1.1% in Austria to 4% in France (Figure Eight).¹⁸ The rates of robbery in the past five years varied from 2.5% to 4% in seven of the countries, with Canada situated at 3.4%. Given statistical margins of error, the differences in these seven rates are probably not statistically meaningful.

Similarly, excluding the United States, there was no meaningful difference in the reported rate of armed confrontation during a robbery in the past five years. However, U.S. respondents were about twice as likely as elsewhere to have been confronted with a weapon during a robbery in the past five years.

In eight of the nine countries, there was a very low reported rate of confrontation

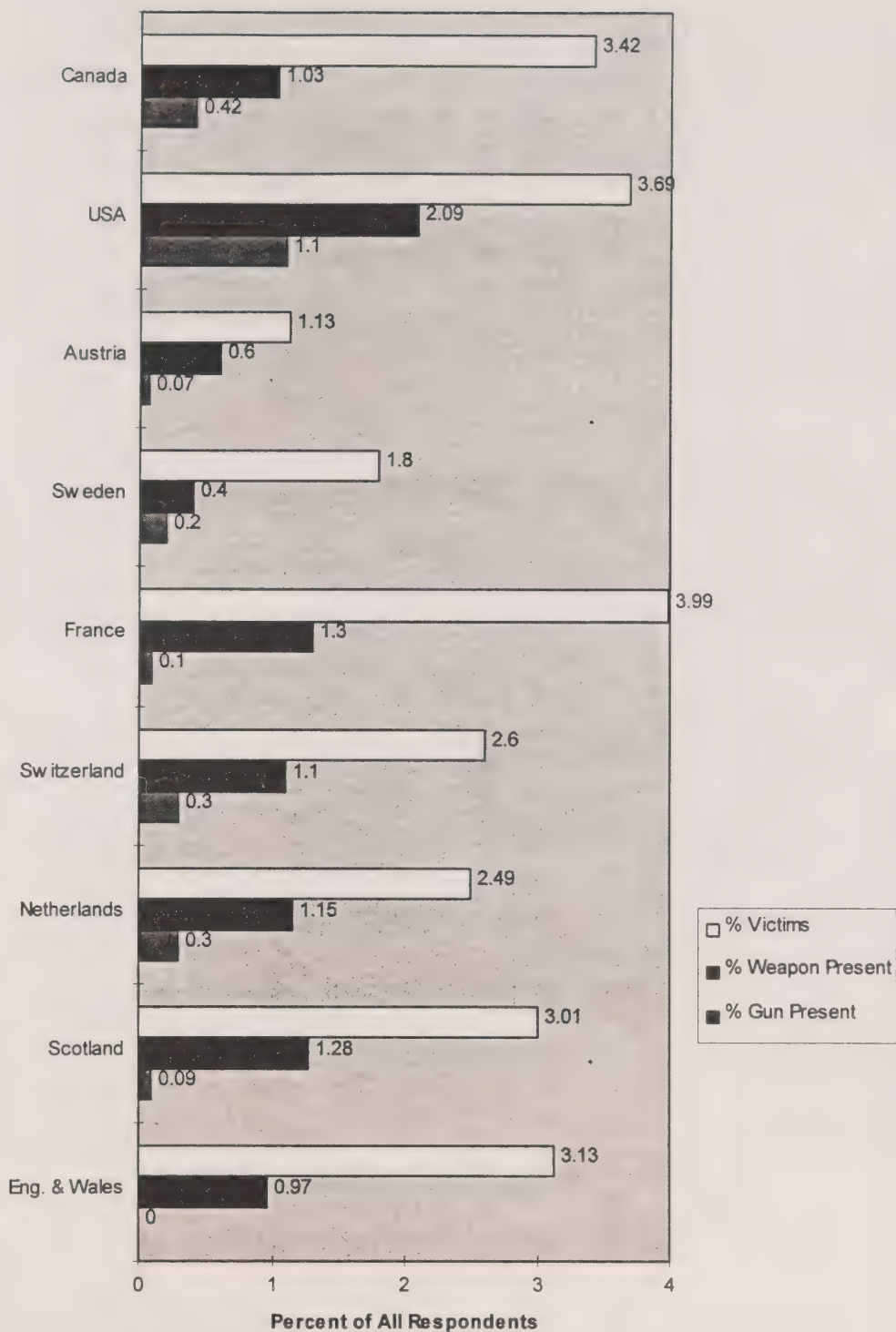
¹⁶ There were too few admitted cases of confrontation with a weapon during sexual offenses to allow for analysis. More detailed information regarding the Canadian situation is available elsewhere (see Johnson, 1996).

¹⁷ The sample size is around 1000 in some countries and 2000 in others (including Canada). While these samples are within the range that is typical for national polls, they are small for estimating relatively rare events such as robbery victimization or possession of a handgun (outside the United States). Given the small sample sizes and relative rarity of robbery, data regarding the prevalence of robbery are only rough estimators of the percentage of a country's residents that have been victims of robbery, armed robbery, and firearm robbery in the last five years. Since respondents were not asked about each incident, these results are not estimators of the crime rate per capita and are likely under-estimates of the occurrence of weapon and firearm confrontations. Of course, such statistical rarity in no way diminishes the serious nature and extent of these crimes.

¹⁸ Robbery is defined as a contact crime, where the perpetrator attempts to steal something from the victim through the use or threat of force; this could include personal force or the use of a weapon.

with a firearm during a robbery (less than 0.5% of the respondents). In contrast, among United States respondents, more than 1% had been a victim of at least one firearm-related robbery in the last five years. About as many U.S. respondents (1.10%) said that they were confronted with a gun as Canadian respondents said that they were confronted with any weapon (1.09%).

Figure Eight: Percentage of Respondents Robbed in the Last Five Years



6.2 Assaults and Threats

In all nine countries, respondents reported being the victim of threats or assaults much more often than robbery (Figure Nine). At the low end, 6% of Austrian respondents were assaulted or threatened at least once during the past five years, in contrast to 1.1% who were robbed. The United States falls at the opposite end of the spectrum, where 16.3 % of the respondents reported an assault or threat. However, over 10% of the respondents in seven countries reported that they were the victim of at least one assault or threat; this number was 12.7% among Canadians.

The data indicate that most assaults and threats did not involve a weapon. Of Canadian respondents, 2.2% reported that they were the victim of an assault with a weapon of any kind. Similarly, in England and Wales 13.0% of respondents reported that they were the victim of an assault or threat, and 2.44% reported that they were the victim of an assault with a weapon.

Few respondents from outside the United States reported that they were the victim of an assault or a threat with a gun (less than 1% in every country, 0.4% in Canada). In stark contrast, 2.2% of all U.S. respondents reported that they were the victim of at least one assault or threat with a gun in the last five years. Thus, firearm-related violence was relatively rare in eight of the nine countries; although, in no way does this underestimate the impact of such occurrences. Firearm-related crime is serious, and any incident of firearm victimization is very threatening.

In Canada, where a weapon was used in an assault or threat, it was most likely to be a weapon of convenience, such as a bottle or bat (Figure Ten). The levels of victimization using these weapons were comparable to Scotland, England and Wales, and the Netherlands. Knives and guns were used less frequently in Canada and their reported presence in an assault or threat was similar to countries other than the United States.

Numerous types of armed threats and assaults were found to be higher in the United States than in other countries. Although the difference is not so great as with firearms, threats and assaults with knives and other weapons (clubs, bottles, bats, etc.) were also higher in the United States than in the other eight countries. The most frequent weapon of assault or threat in the United States was a firearm, deviating from the trend in the other eight countries. Among these respondents, not only was the prevalence of violence greatest in the United States, but also the occurrence of armed violence, and particularly firearm-related violence.

Figure Nine: Percentage of Respondents Assaulted or Threatened in the Last Five Years

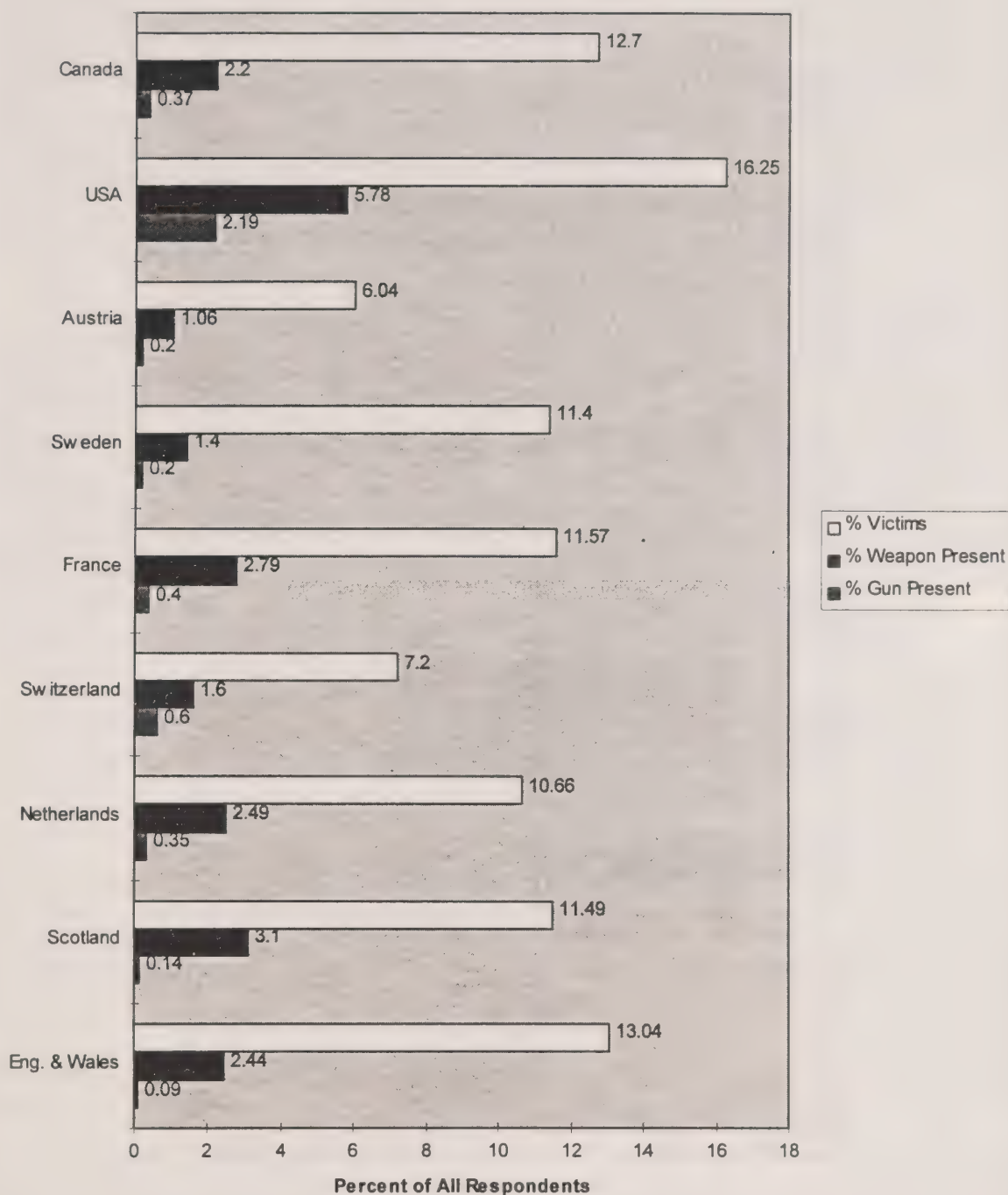
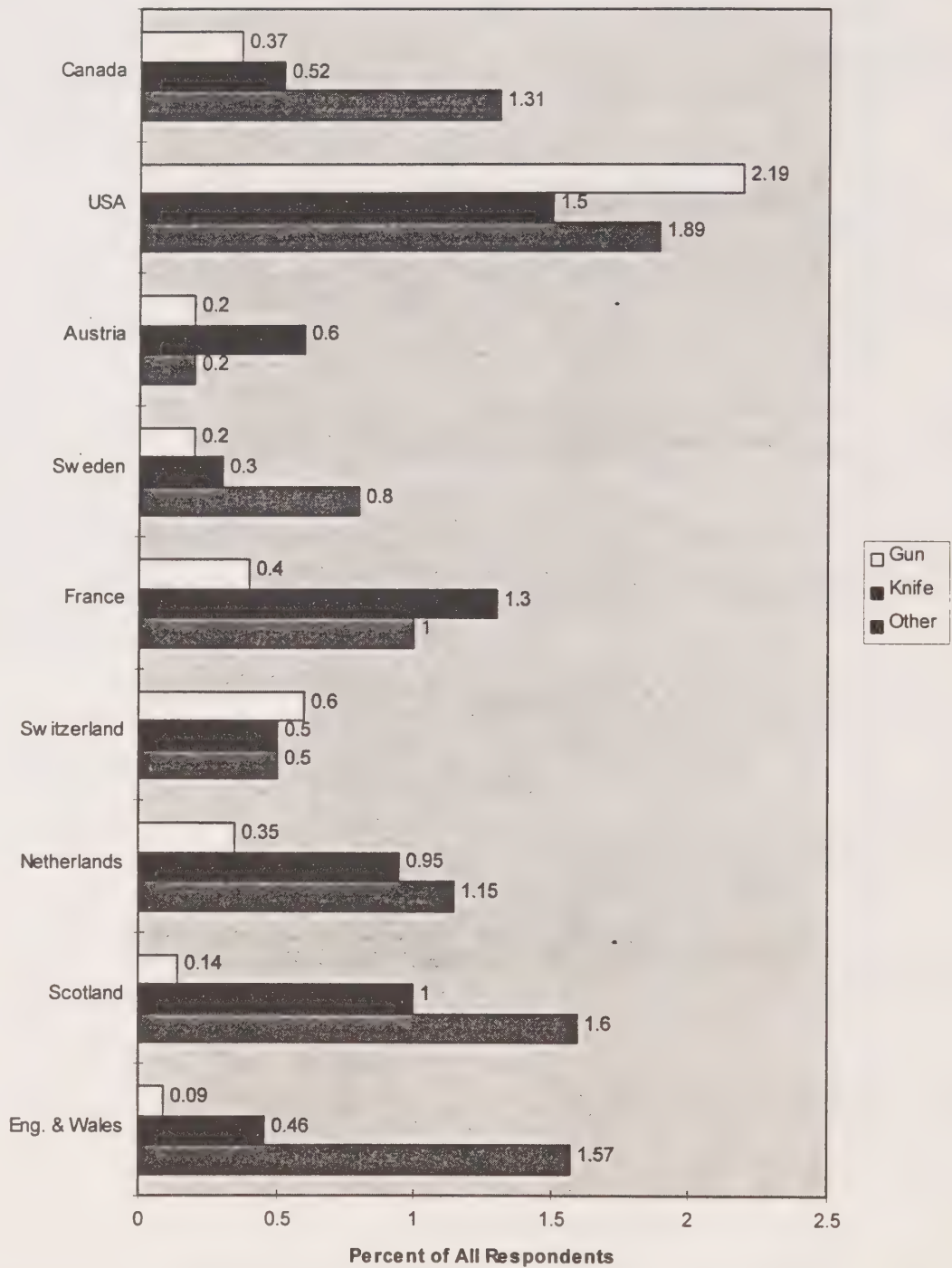


Figure Ten: Respondents Assaulted With a Weapon in the Last Five Years



7.0 SIZE OF PLACE OF RESIDENCE AND FIREARMS OWNERSHIP: INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

In the context of a study of victimization and firearms ownership, size of place is a surrogate measure for a rural to urban continuum; it is assumed that the smaller the size of place, the more rural the area.¹⁹ However, across countries the definition of what is a place may vary widely.²⁰ In all countries except Switzerland, firearms ownership was most common among residents of the smallest places and generally, least common among residents of the largest places. However, there was generally no clear pattern of relationship between size of place of residence and gun ownership among residents of places greater than 10,000 and less than 1,000,000 population (Figure 11). Canada was one exception, where gun ownership, and especially long gun ownership, is almost directly related to size of place of residence.

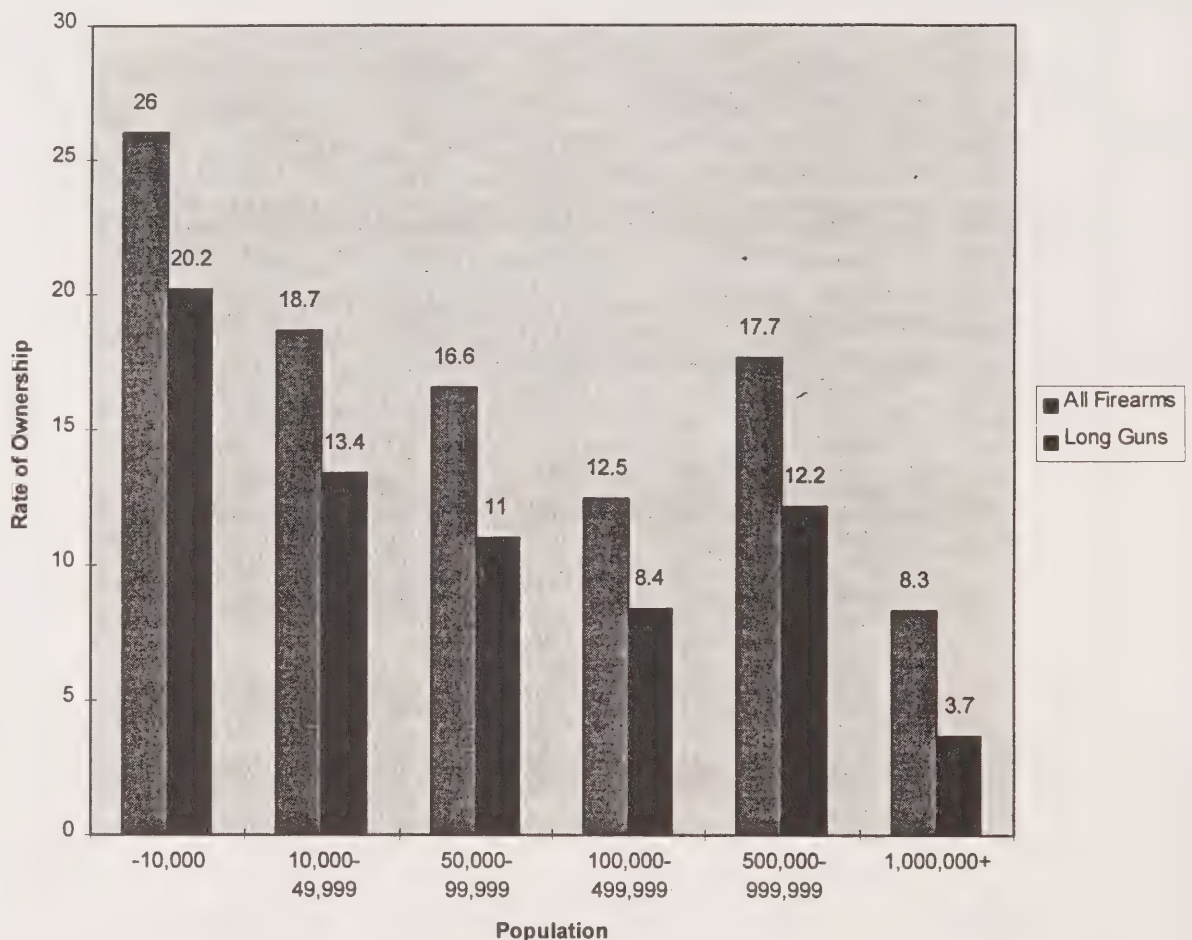
The contrast between small and large places was greatest in those countries that have at least one city of more than 1,000,000 population (Table A). For example, 21.2% of Austrian households in communities of less than 10,000 residents owned at least one firearm; in contrast, only 7% of Viennese households (a metropolitan area) owned a firearm. In France, 37.7% of households in the smallest towns owned at least one gun compared to 8.8% of those in cities above 1,000,000 population. Among United States residents of communities with less than 10,000 population, 64.5% owned a gun compared to 25.8% of those who live in cities of more than 1,000,000. Gun ownership is a legal requirement in Switzerland; therefore, there is no relationship between gun ownership and size of place of residence.

¹⁹ The urban/ rural continuum is very important in a survey on victimization and attitudes about crime and the criminal justice system. However, this continuum is measured only by size of place in the IC(V)S, and as noted above, size of place of residence has different meaning within and across countries. Possibly, census data and other governmental statistics could better characterize communities than the survey. In industrialized societies, these data could be linked to the survey by using post codes (limited by confidentiality) or telephone area codes and exchanges. For example, in the United States, a good characterization of the urban/ rural continuum can be derived from census information on predominate occupations and industries plus county characterizations of land use and tourism. The key to describing communities is to supply enough information in the IC(V)S to allow for linking without violating confidentiality.

²⁰ In the United States, the census lists many rural residents as not living in a place, while many places of less than 10,000 population are suburbs of large cities. In the Netherlands, several small villages and towns may be part of the same town government and even some highly urbanized areas; Amsterdam, for example, includes farming communities. Respondents were asked to estimate the size of the place they lived in. Across the nine countries, around 10% of respondents could not identify the size of the place they lived in.

Residents of large cities were much less likely to be long gun owners than residents of towns of less than 10,000, with Switzerland being the exception (Table B).²¹ Twenty six percent of French residents of towns of less than 10,000 had a long gun in their household compared to 5% of those living in towns of more than 1,000,000. Similarly, in the United States, residents of the smallest places (52.6%) were much more likely to own a long gun than those of the largest places (12.2%). As with overall ownership, the relationship between size of place of residence and long gun ownership was weak for respondents living in places of more than 10,000 and less than 1,000,000 residents.

**Figure 11: Average Rate of Gun Ownership by Size of Place of Residence
(for all nine countries)**



²¹ Since few respondents in most countries own a handgun, it is not possible to accurately calculate handgun ownership by size of place of residence.

Since the majority of guns were owned for hunting in Canada and hunting is mostly a rural activity, it is not surprising that long gun ownership was directly linked to size of place of residence (Table B). In places of less than 10,000 population, 33.6% of households owned at least one long gun. In cities of 10,000-100,000 population, about 18% of households owned one or more long guns, while residents of cities above 1,000,000 population were very unlikely to own a long gun (1.2%). Thus, in Canada, gun owners predominately owned long guns for hunting, and long gun ownership was strongly related to size of place of residence.

Table A: Percentage Gun Ownership and Size of Place of Residence

	Size of Place of Residence						Total
	-10,000	10,000-49,999	50,000-99,999	100,000-499,999	500,000-999,999	1,000,000+	
England & Wales	6.4	3.2	4.2	3.2	3.1	2.9	4.2
Scotland	7.2	3.0	1.9	2.7	.6	1.2	1.2
Netherlands	3.3	2.6	2.1	2.0	2.3	NA	2.4
Switzerland	37.7	46.2	26.9	23.8	29.1	NA	36.4
France	31.9	20.2	24.5	8.4	29.6	8.8	23.8
Sweden	24.5	13.7	12.8	6.6	14.1	9.4	16.6
Austria	21.2	11.7	9.4	9.7	NA	7.0	16.0
United States	64.5	46.7	48.5	43.0	46.1	25.8	48.6
Canada	37.3	21.2	18.9	13.5	17.0	2.8	21.8

Table B: Percentage Long Gun Ownership and Size of Place of Residence

	Size of Place of Residence						Total
	-10,000	10,000-49,999	50,000-99,999	100,000-499,999	500,000-999,999	1,000,000+	
England & Wales	5.3	3.0	2.2	2.6	3.1	1.1	3.4
Scotland	6.1	2.5	1.9	1.9	.6	1.2	3.7
Netherlands	2.1	1.1	1.2	.5	.8	NA	1.2
Switzerland	22.3	30.7	16.9	14.8	29.1	NA	22.7
France	26.0	17.3	14.8	4.4	15.7	5.0	18.5
Sweden	20.9	9.4	11.1	2.8	8.4	3.6	12.7
Austria	12.8	2.6	5.1	4.7	NA	1.6	8.6
United States	52.6	35.6	27.1	33.0	26.2	12.2	35.4
Canada	33.6	18.1	18.4	10.6	13.9	1.2	19.2

8.0 CONCLUSION

The International Crime (Victim) Survey is a unique example of comparative international research, facilitating the administration of questions on an international basis which were previously impracticable. Over the years, 58 countries have participated, many having no prior experience in survey research on crime. Not only does the IC(V)S serve to highlight Canada's position among the broader spectrum of firearms ownership and crime victimization on an international basis, but it offers a unique perspective into the differences between the country's regions.

Internationally, Canada was in the mid-range of firearms ownership, with almost 22% of Canadian households owning a firearm; almost all of these households possessed at least one long gun (95.1%). Household levels of firearm ownership varied from 14% in Ontario to 36% in the Atlantic provinces. Consistently, the most common reason for owning a gun across the country was hunting (72.7%).

Canada was in a group of five countries in which 3% to 4% of the respondents reported being the victim of a robbery in the last five years. One percent of Canadian respondents reported being the victim of a robbery, while 0.42% were the victims of a firearm-related attack. Respondents in all countries were less likely to be robbed than to be assaulted or attacked; Canada was in the middle range of likelihood.

Gun ownership was related to size of place of residence; residents of the smallest communities were most likely to own a firearm, while residents of larger cities were least likely to own a firearm. This relationship is especially apparent with regards to long gun ownership in Canada. In Canada's largest cities, 1.2% of the respondents owned a long gun, in comparison to 33.6% of those from small communities.

World-wide interest in regulation, trafficking, and ownership of firearms is reflected in the 1997 United Nations International Study on Firearms Regulation (Report of the Secretary General, April 1997), which has proven to be a rich alternate source of international information. Approximately forty-six countries have responded to the in-depth questionnaire, comprising 65% of the world's population, representing a cross-section of industrialized and developing countries and countries in transition.²² The results indicated that the majority of countries regulate firearms in some manner through restrictions and prohibitions on specific types of firearms. In addition, more than half of the countries had recently amended their legislation or administration regarding civilian firearms ownership. These findings point to the importance of firearms research, statistics, and information gathering on a cross-national basis.

²² Reflects surveys received as of March 1997.

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APPENDIX A

THE QUESTIONS ON FIREARMS

Robbery

Robbery Screener (to determine if further questions are asked):

Q. 70 Over the past five years, has anyone stolen something from you by using force or threatening you, or did anybody try to steal something from you by using force or threatening force?

- 1) yes
- 2) no
- 3) don't know

Firearm Related Questions:

Q. 195 Did (any of) the offender(s) have a knife, a gun, another weapon or something used as a weapon?

- 1) yes
- 2) no
- 3) don't know

If yes,

Q.196 What was it?

- 1) knife
- 2) gun
- 3) other weapon/stick
- 4) something used as a weapon
- 5) don't know

Continue with question 197

Q. 197 Was the weapon actually used?

(Interviewer guide: weapon counted as used if:

- knife/other weapon/stick: threatened with it or victim in physical contact with the weapon

- gun: threatened with it or bullet fired)

- 1) yes
- 2) no

Sexual Incidents

Sexual Victimization Screener:

- Q.80 First, a rather personal question. People sometimes grab, touch or assault others for sexual reasons in a really offensive way. This can happen either at home, or elsewhere, for instance in a pub, the street, at school, on public transport, in cinemas, on the beach, or at one's workplace. Over the past five years has anyone done this to you? Please take your time to think about it.*
(Interviewer guide: include all domestic assaults)
- 1) yes
 - 2) no
 - 3) don't know

Firearm Related Questions:

- Q. 226 Did (any of) the offender(s) have a knife, a gun, another weapon or something used as a weapon?*
- 1) yes
 - 2) no
 - 3) don't know

If yes,

- Q. 227 What was it?*
- 1) knife
 - 2) gun
 - 3) other weapon/stick
 - 4) something used as a weapon
 - 5) don't know

Continue with question 228

- Q. 228 Was the weapon actually used?*
(Interviewer guide: weapon counted as used if:
- knife/other weapon/stick: threatened with it or victim in physical contact with the weapon
- gun: threatened with it or bullet fired)
- 1) yes
 - 2) no

Assaults and Threats

Assaults/Threats Screener:

Q.85 Apart from the incidents just covered, have you over the past five years been personally attacked or threatened by someone in a way that really frightened you, either at home or elsewhere, such as in a pub, in the street, at school, on public transport, on the beach, or at your workplace?

(Interviewer guide: include sexual violence against men, if mentioned; include domestic assaults)

- 1) yes
- 2) no
- 3) don't know

Firearm Related Questions:

Q. 257 Did (any of) the offender(s) have a knife, a gun, another weapon or something used as a weapon?

- 1) yes
- 2) no
- 3) don't know

If yes,

Q. 258 What was it?

- 1) knife
- 2) gun
- 3) other weapon/stick
- 4) something used as a weapon
- 5) don't know

Continue with question 259

Q. 259 Was the weapon actually used?

(Interviewer guide: weapon counted as used if:

- knife/other weapon/stick: threatened with it or victim in physical contact with the weapon

- gun: threatened with it or bullet fired)

- 1) yes
- 2) no

Personal and Household Information

Q. 341 Do you or anyone in your household own a handgun, shotgun, rifle or air rifle?

- 1) yes
- 2) no
- 3) refuses to say
- 4) don't know

If yes,

*Q. 342 Could you tell me which sort of guns you own?
(code all guns if more than one mentioned; multiple responses allowed)*

- 1) handgun
- 2) shotgun
- 3) rifle
- 4) air rifle
- 5) other gun
- 6) refuses to say
- 7) don't know

Continue with question 343

*Q. 343 For what reason do you own the gun(s)?
(multiple responses allowed)*

- 1) for hunting
- 2) target shooting (sports)
- 3) as part of a collection (collector's item)
- 4) for crime prevention/protection
- 5) in armed forces or police
- 6) because it has always been in our family/home
- 7) refuses to answer

